

# ACSO Access and Inclusion Plan 2023-2026



# Acknowledgement of Country

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The Australian Community Support Organisation (ACSO) would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we live and work, across this nation. ACSO proudly acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australia's first peoples and pay respect to their rich culture, lores, customs, and Elders past and present. We strongly embrace the spirit of reconciliation and will continue to work towards ensuring an equal voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly those who have come in contact with the justice system.

This document was prepared on the lands of the Woi Wurrung and Boon Wurrung peoples.

# Recognition of people with disability

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We acknowledge the expertise and advocacy of people with disability and thank them for their valuable time in sharing their lived experience to support the development of this plan.

# Inclusion commitment

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ACSO recognises the right to a safe and inclusive service without bias. ACSO is committed to the equitable treatment of its participants, employees, and partners. We believe in humanity and celebrating the diverse voices of our community through leadership, practice, and policy design, to honour and embrace diverse traditions, cultures, and experiences of those we support and work alongside.



# Message from the CEO

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The Australian Community Support Organisation (ACSO) Access and Inclusion Plan provides the roadmap for how ACSO will be an employer and service provider of choice for people living with a disability. For 38 years ACSO has been providing services for people with access requirements, and in 2021 we invested in dedicated resources to embed Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity across the organisation. This Access and Inclusion Plan reflects our future intent and commitment.

ACSO's vision and work in reducing incarceration has occurred in parallel with the shift in community attitude and government policies that brought about deinstitutionalisation during the 1990's. However, even after numerous legislative reviews and government inquiries, traumatic experiences of neglect and abuse have continued, triggering the commencement in 2019 of the current Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.

Creating a service and a working environment that celebrates access and inclusion is aligned with ACSO's purpose to strengthen the wellbeing of communities by advocating for and delivering services which divert people away from the justice system. ACSO will continue to advocate for inclusive practice as we collaborate with other agencies and sectors and promote the social model of disability which is the gold standard of inclusion.

ACSO's first Access and Inclusion Plan is robust with careful consideration in matching our ambition to be a leader in disability inclusion employment and support services.

Our goals are:

- To be culturally responsive and appropriate
- Ensure that ACSO can attract and retain people from diverse backgrounds
- Nurture, support, and invest in lived experience expertise
- Provide meaningful and rewarding careers in an inclusive and equitable working environment
- Advocate and promote the effectiveness of the social model of disability

ACSO will continue to strengthen and enhance flexible work arrangements, informed by this plan and our engagement with our employees and clients with disability. ACSO will deliver services closer to where our employees and clients reside, for many people with disability, reduced travel requirements and variable work times can make a significant difference to quality of life. It is important to note that for people who have access and inclusion requirements, this time of uncertainty will continue. ACSO recognises that through uncertainty grows opportunity and this plan will continue to create an environment where people with disability have every opportunity available to them to utilise their skills and have a long fulfilling career at ACSO.

Vaughan Winther  
CEO



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# About ACSO



From the organic beginnings of our founder, Stan McCormack, the Australian Community Support Organisation (ACSO) has grown to be a long-term partner of choice for government and industry to help break the cycle of people repeatedly entering the justice system because they lack the support to make change.

ACSO work with people at risk of entering or who have already entered the justice system. Our work supports, diverts, or reintegrates people through a range of services including mental health, alcohol and other drug treatment, intensive residential support, housing, and employment. These services span the entire justice continuum from prevention to rehabilitation. ACSO do not exclude people based on their offending history and are equipped to effectively manage risk alongside government.

The quality of our work and the leadership we have shown for over 35 years speaks for itself. We understand the linkages of issues and policies and work to connect across government and industry to evolve services, improve equitable access to services, and strengthen the evidence base to prevent people from becoming entrenched in the justice system. This will lead to better outcomes for communities across Australia, our clients, and government partners.

**Our Vision** is for a community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and prison truly is the last resort.

**Our Purpose** is to strengthen the wellbeing of communities by advocating for and delivering services that divert people away from the justice system.





# Introduction



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ACSO recognises the right to a safe and inclusive service without bias, and is committed to the equitable treatment of our participants, employees, and partners.

Our Access and Inclusion Plan 2023 – 2026 (AIP) provides the framework for us to focus on the diverse voices of our community through leadership, practice, and policy design, and to honour and embrace the varied traditions, cultures, and experiences of those we support and work alongside.

At ACSO, we thrive on delivering the best outcomes for our participants, employees and partners. Our AIP has the potential to demonstrate leadership in access and inclusion for people with disability and ensure we embed continuous improvement in our services, programs, communication, built environment, policies, processes, and employment. This lends to the importance of our very first AIP, which demonstrates our commitment to inclusive practices which promote accessibility, independence, and opportunity. We do this by considering the experiences, needs, and accessibility requirements of our participants, employees, and partners.

## Developing the Plan

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At the core of developing ACSO's AIP, consultation with both internal employees and external stakeholders was vital to delivering a plan that is fit for purpose.

Our commitment to engaging people with disability throughout this process was demonstrated by workshops held with the Lived Experience Advisory Panel and Residential Services, as well as employees with disability. Each workshop focused on the understanding of what worked well, what could be improved, and what needs to be done differently in the future. All workshops were informed by the impacts of the social model of disability and removing barriers, what our legal requirements are, as well as understanding the benefits and outcomes for people with disability.

Our internal employees and leadership team were highly engaged in this process and provided valuable feedback on how we as an organisation can work better across all areas to improve access and inclusion, and increase community outcomes for people with disability.



# Snapshot of disability

## Employees

Around 1 million employees (or nearly 10% of Australia's workforce) work with disability. The labor force participation rate for people with disability is at 53%, as opposed to 83% of people without disability.

## Mental Health

Almost half of all Australians will experience poor mental health in their lifetime.

## Ageing

Disability prevalence increases with age, and nearly 40% of the Australian workforce is aged 45 or over.

## Carers

Around 2.7 million Australians (or 12% of the population) are carers.

## Public Transport

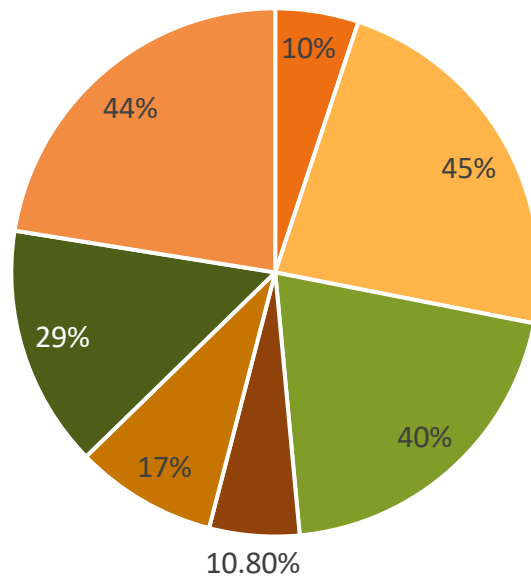
1 in 6 people with disability have had difficulty using public transport.

## Accessing Buildings or Facilities

1 in 3 people with disability had difficulty accessing locations due to challenges with mobility or communication.

## Disability Discrimination

44% of Australian Human Rights Commission complaints are about disability discrimination.



- Employees
  - Ageing
  - Public Transport
  - Disability Discrimination
- Mental Health
  - Carers
  - Accessing buildings or facilities

[Department of Employment, Australian Jobs, 2015](#) (Employees)

[ABS Population Projections, Australia, 2017](#) (Mental Health)

[ABS Survey of Disability Ageing and Carers, 2018](#) (Ageing & Carers)

[ABS Survey of Disability Ageing and Carers, 2018](#) (Ageing & Carers)

[Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2019](#) (Transport, Buildings & facilities & Discrimination)

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# Access and Inclusion Framework



2022

ACSO's AIP is guided by several legislative requirements as well as related policies and frameworks. These include:

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities  
Disability Discrimination Act (Cth) 1992  
Australia's Disability Strategy 2021 – 2031

The executive is responsible for ensuring that the operational governance and day-to-day running of the organisation are informed by a system of established policies, processes and procedures which align with ACSO's strategic direction and the Framework. Clinical governance is integral to ACSO's approach to responding to client needs and risks in a responsive, effective, and safe manner.

It is integral that ACSO maintains high standards of governance and leadership at all levels of the organisation, as this assists with the maintenance and continuous improvement of high-quality and effective services.

# Disability Concepts

## 2.1 Social Model of Disability

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The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) promotes the social model of Disability and reaffirms that all people with all types of disability must enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The social model of Disability, as opposed to the medical model of disability, helps us to recognize the barriers society puts in place that make it harder for people with disability to participate on an equal basis. Once these barriers are removed, it creates a fair and equal opportunity for people with disability to experience greater independence, choice, and control.

At ACSO, we acknowledged that the environments we operate in may not always consider the social model of disability. We are committed to the social model of disability and endeavour to embed this concept into our way of working moving forward.

The Social Model of Disability is outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and defines disability as:

*"a long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which in interaction with various barriers may hinder a person's full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."*

We also acknowledge temporary and short-term disability.

## 2.2 Ableism

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At its core, Ableism refers to any bias, prejudice, and discrimination against people with disability, centering on the idea that people with disability are less valuable in society than people without disability. It also includes any misconceptions about people with disability, as well as harmful stereotypes and language.

Just like most forms of discrimination, people do not always know they are thinking or behaving in an ableist way. This bias often stems from the outdated 'medical model of disability' where people with disability needed to be 'fixed' or 'cured' in order to participate in society.

In delivering our services and programs, we aim for a fair and equitable society for people with disability, where discrimination is addressed, and negative attitudes are eliminated.

## 2.3 Language Preference

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As per the theory of intersectionality, the language preference of people with disability is very personal and should be driven by the individual.

**Person-first language** is language that puts a person before their individual disability, such as being a *person with disability*.

**Identity-first language** is language that connects with the concept of the social model of disability, where people are 'disabled' by society and prefer being referred to as a *disabled person*.

For the purpose of this plan, ACSO will use *person-first* language.

## 2.4 Intersectionality

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Intersectionality is an important part of diversity and inclusion as it defines how different parts of a person's identity and potential discrimination can overlap with one another and cause multiple factors of disadvantage. Acknowledging characteristics such as ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and gender that intersect to form the 'whole person' beyond their disability can make an impact on understanding disclosure rates and engagement with our services.

At ACSO, our support for considering an intersectional lens in everything we do promotes a workplace culture of mutual respect and responsibility.



# Our Progress Towards Access and Inclusion



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As we continue to build momentum with our first AIP, ACSO is proud of the achievements already in place to assist our access and inclusion journey for people with disability.

### Inclusive Practice Champions

In 2020, ACSO implemented the Inclusive Practice Champions Group to drive inclusive practice at an individual level. Each Champion receives the support, resources, and the training they need to influence and challenge others, and to contribute to building a more culturally responsive ACSO.

### Equity & Inclusion Lead

The role of the Equity and Inclusion Lead provides the opportunity to develop and lead strategies across the organisation to promote and embed inclusion. In 2022, this role moved from a contract to a permanent role and has a diverse portfolio, including access and inclusion for people with disability.

### Accessible Communications

The importance of ensuring everyone is understood and can communicate in their preferred way relies on alternative formats. Our residential homes provide information in alternative and accessible formats including Plain and Easy English as well several employees learning Auslan to increase accessible communications with our residents.

### Learning & Development

At ACSO, we pride ourselves on inclusion of people with disability and our aim is to be a disability confident employer. The organisational learning and development that we provide, Supporting People Who Have a Disability, includes questions and boundaries when first talking to a person with disability, and has some specific information on how to work with people with intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorders, and people with acquired brain injuries. Working with the NDIS, it is run by the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare who developed the learning with ACSO. The disabilities covered are the ones that are most represented within our programs.

### Awareness & Events

At ACSO, we recognise days of significance such as International Day of People with Disability and RUOK Day by holding morning tea events and have an active social media presence to increase inclusion and raise awareness of people with disability.

### Advocacy

We regularly make submissions to government, independent commissions, and impacted industry enquiries to lend our voice and advocate for change to people impacted by the criminal justice system in Australia. Some of the submissions and position papers we have developed include a submission to the Productivity Commission for Forensic Mental Health, as well as an issues paper in response to Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.

# Focus Areas & Actions



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The actions and priorities outlined below are related to outcomes of the stakeholder engagement. These actions have been reviewed and condensed to ensure that the number of actions reflect best practice of less than 25 actions implemented over a three-year period.

In order to ensure that the implementation of the plan is successful, it is suggested that the AIP is aligned to ACSO's overall strategic objectives.





## Focus Area 1 - Meaningful Client Experience

*Programs, services, and information*

Our clients inform our practice and have a positive experience at ACSO.

## Focus Area 2 - Wellbeing of Our People

*Employment and Volunteering*

Our people are safe, well, and engaged with our One ACSO culture.

## Focus Area 3 - Influencing Change

*Advocacy and Partnerships*

Our research, clients, and partnerships contribute to inclusive communities and criminal justice reform.

## Focus Area 4 - Innovative Design

*Accessible systems, processes, and buildings*

Our organisation delivers innovative services informed by evidence and enhanced by digital transformation.

## Focus Area 5 - Sustainable Growth

*Co-design, Community engagement and Continuous improvement*

Our systems and capabilities enable strong performance, financial strength, and strategic growth.







# Focus Area 1: Meaningful client experience

## Programs, Services, and Information

Action	Timeline	Outcomes	Measures	Responsibility
1.1 Update ACSO's rights and responsibilities document to include access and inclusion in consultation with people with disability.	2024/2025	Improved satisfaction for clients with disability.	A Rights and Responsibilities document is developed to include access and inclusion and developed in consultation with people with disability.	Operations / Quality and Risk
1.2 Review and update internal Brand Guidelines to ensure access requirements are included, such as captions on all videos, Plain English and Easy English, as well as accessible fonts, logos and language.	2024/2025	Our employees have increased understanding of delivering accessible communications for people with disability.	Our Brand Guidelines are reviewed and updated.	Communications & Advocacy
1.3 Develop and implement a Standard Operating Procedure on identifying accessible programs and activities for individuals in ACSO Residential Services.	2025/2026	Increased participation for people with disability in activities and programs.	A guide on accessible programs and activities is developed and implemented.	Practice Unit
1.4 Create Plain English guidelines on programs and activities for employees to support clients.	2025/2026	Increased participation for people with disability in activities and programs.	A guide on accessible programs and activities is developed and implemented.	Practice Unit
1.5 Review and update our website and intranet to ensure our website meets Level AA Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.	2024/2025	People with disability feel included and have access to the information they need in the format they require.	Our websites meet Level AA compliance to WCAG. Our website is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure compliance is maintained.  Alternative formats are available for people with disability.	Communications & Advocacy
1.6 Review our website information for alternative formats of documents.	2024/2025	People with disability feel included and have access to the information they need in the format they require.	Our websites meet Level AA compliance to WCAG. Our website is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure compliance is maintained.  Alternative formats are available for people with disability.	Communications & Advocacy

## Focus Area 2 – Wellbeing of our People

### Employment and Volunteering

Action	Timeline	Outcomes	Measures	Responsibility
2.1 Create a Workplace Adjustment Procedure and resources.	2024/2025	Increased satisfaction of employees with disability.	Increased satisfaction of employees with disability.	People & Culture
2.2 Review and update disability related learning and development to include the social model of disability.	Completed	Increased knowledge and understanding of disability in the workplace.	Support our people with disability learning including the social model of disability.	Learning & Development
2.3 Ensure annual awareness events such as International Day of People with Disability and Carers Week are promoted and acknowledged.	Completed	Increased knowledge and understanding of disability in the workplace.	Annual events and awareness campaigns are held to acknowledge people with disability.	Equity & Inclusion
2.4 Review and update the employment and recruitment lifecycle processes to remove barriers for people with disability.	2024/2025	Increased employment of people with a disability. Increased awareness of internal employees on recruiting people with a disability.	Our attraction, recruitment, selection, and onboarding processes are accessible for candidates and employees with disability.	People & Culture
2.5 Develop and implement a guide for vendors to ensure all new eLearn's are Level AA WCAG Compliant.	2025/2026	Employees with disability have access to equitable learning and development opportunities.	A guide is developed to ensure all new eLearn modules are compliant with Level AA WCAG Compliance.	Learning & Development



## Focus Area 3 – Influencing Change

### Advocacy and partnerships

Action	Timeline	Outcomes	Measures	Responsibility
3.1 Scope the opportunity to partner with Disability Employment Service Providers	2024/2025	Increased employment and economic participation opportunities for people with disability.	Ongoing relationships are built with Disability Service Providers to assist with employment pathways.	Service Design & Impact

## Focus Area 4 – Innovative Design

### Co-Design / Community Engagement / Continuous Improvement

Action	Timeline	Outcomes	Measures	Responsibility
4.1 Our community engagement processes are enhanced to target and include people with disability.	2023/2024	Improved engagement outcomes for people with disability.	Our Advisory panels and stakeholder engagement plans have clear and defined outcomes to include people with disability.	Service Design & Impact
4.2 Review client feedback systems for the purpose of business improvement.	2024/2025	People with disability feel included and have access to the information they need in the format they require.  Systematic issues are identified and resolved in a timely manner.	Easy Read versions and alternative formats to provide feedback or make complaints are implemented, with the potential to including video Submissions..	Service Design & Impact
4.3 Scope the opportunity to embed access and inclusion questions into employee surveys.	2025/2026	Increased satisfaction of employees with disability.	The annual employment survey includes disability questions and feedback is used for continuous improvement.	People & Culture

## Focus Area 5 – Sustainable Growth

### Accessible systems, processes, and buildings

Action	Timeline	Outcomes	Measures	Responsibility
5.1 Develop an access checklist for new infrastructure to ensure all aspects of accessibility are considered, including accessible transport and parking.	2023/2024	<p>A fully accessible environment is created for clients and employees with disability.</p> <p>Our workplace is welcoming and inclusive for people with disability.</p>	A checklist is created to assess and remove barriers to ensure all new infrastructure meets accessibility criteria.	Facilities, Fleet, & Administration/Equity, & Inclusion
5.2 Review and update the Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan process for people with disability.	2023/2024	People with disability feel respected and are safe and secure.	<p>Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan processes are updated and communicated.</p> <p>EGRESS policies and procedures are reviewed to include people with disability.</p>	Facilities, Fleet & Administration/Quality, Risk & Safety
5.3 Embed social procurement into our relevant policies and processes, including access and inclusion for people with disability as an integral component of procurement.	2023/2024	Increased economic participation for people with disability in our community.	Our internal procurement processes are reviewed and updated to include access and inclusion criteria.	Finance/Service Development & Impact





# Implementation, Monitoring, and Review



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We are committed to the implementation of the AIP and will continue to monitor the progress and respond effectively to changes within the disability sector at a National and State level. It is also necessary to ensure the implementation enables successful outcomes and creates sustainable change for people with disability in our community and within our workforce. We will endeavor to strengthen engagement with external stakeholders as part of the ongoing review process.

Governance and accountability arrangements have been established to support and embed access and inclusion in everything we do. The following provisions are in place

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## 5.1 Responsibility and accountability

- A Communications Plan to be developed to increase awareness of the AIP with both internal employees and external Stakeholders
- Consultation mechanisms are developed to ensure people with disability are involved in the implementation process and feedback.
- Monthly Access and Inclusion Committee working group meetings established for Year 1 of the implementation plan, with the intent to reduce these to quarterly or bi-annually moving forward.
- Undertake a mid-term review of the Plan to ensure the Plan remains consistent with national and state disability frameworks.
- Regularly monitor and review actions and collate information for reporting purposes.
- Provide a copy of the AIP to publish on the Australian Human Rights Commission Disability Action Plan Register
- Publicly report against this plan in the annual report and on the website.
- Half-yearly progress reports to The Board.
- Annual communication to ACSO employees on the progress against our plan.

## Feedback

To help us improve access and inclusion for people with disability, we value your feedback on this document via:

By phone: (03) 9413 700

Online: [acso.org.au](http://acso.org.au)

In person: Wurundjeri Lands 1 Hoddle Street, Richmond Victoria 3121

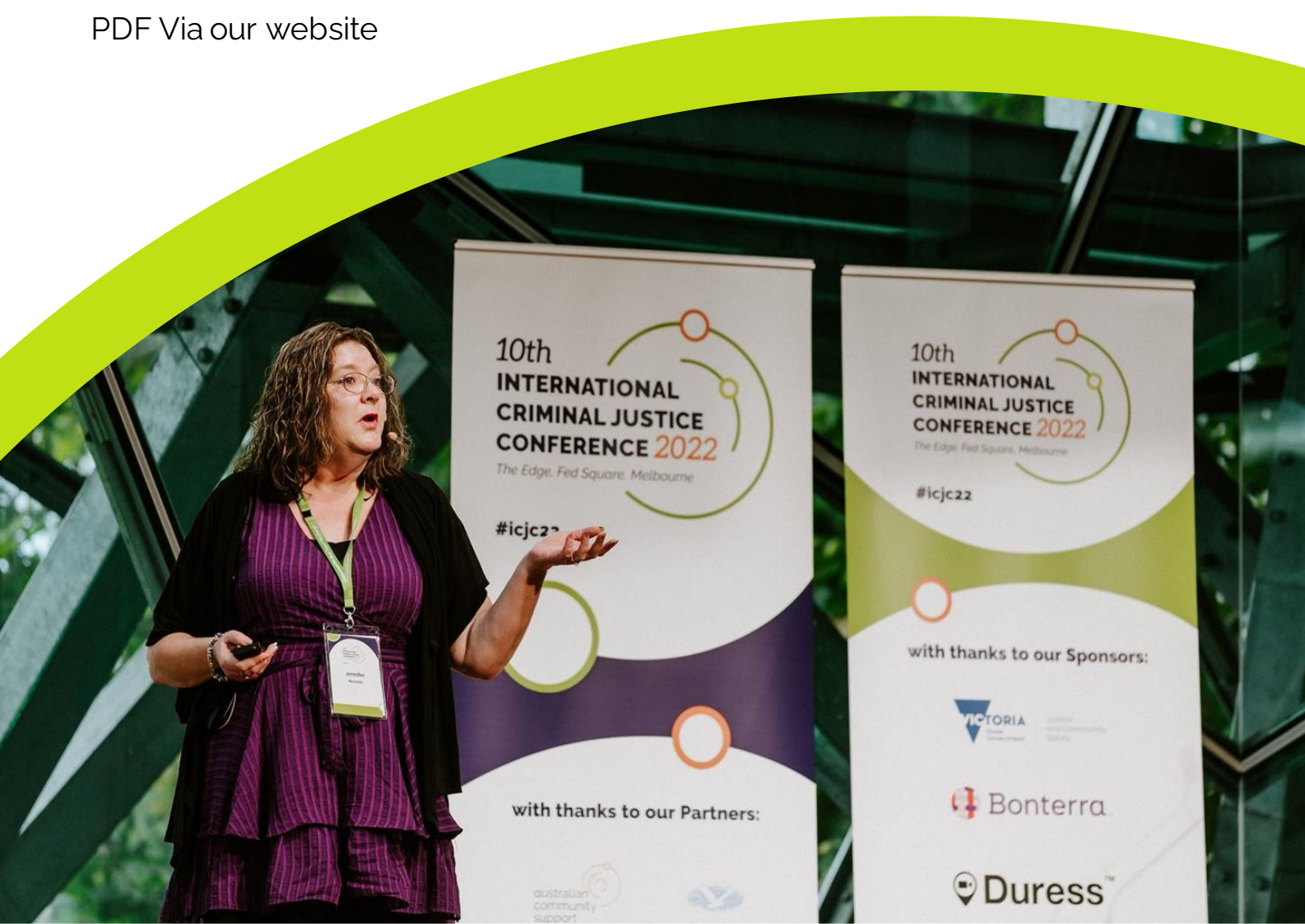
By post: Wurundjeri Lands 1 Hoddle Street, Richmond Victoria 3121

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Hard copy in standard and large print

Electronically by email in Word or

PDF Via our website



Understand  
the story.  
**Support the  
change.**



